

**Fairfield Association**  
**Fauna and Orchard sub-Group [FOG]**  
**Minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 5th December 2013, 7.30 pm**  
**at Whitegates, Sunnyside Close**

**Present:** Graham Brandwood, Dave Brookes, Glenys Ferguson (mins), Tony Finn, Oliver Fulton, Ian Procter, Hilary Short, Mick Short (chair), Chris Workman

1. **Apologies:** Andrew Brennand, Helen Hicks, Sue Nieduszynska, Rebecca Procter
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Agreed.
3. **Current/recent developments: Hawking:** Someone has been seen on the Pads path flying a Harris hawk. This is a licensed bird and it is unclear what, if any, sanctions could be imposed to prevent it flying over the nature reserve. However, the local PCSO has spoken with owner and we are hoping that he will fly the hawk elsewhere in future.
4. **Matters arising from Minutes:**
  - **Tool shed coping stone and key:** The builder is now aware that these jobs have yet to be completed. **Mick** will continue to pursue as necessary.
  - **Payment of haymaking & wildflower seed:** Rueben Neville at Lancashire Wildlife Trust has now produced a list giving the provenance of the wildflower seed (**Ian** to pass to Dave) and has requested the Finance Section to raise an invoice. Given the need to finalise this promptly in order to submit a claim to Natural England, **Ian** was asked to contact LWT's Finance Section directly.
  - **Fauna/Flora Management Plan:** Graeme Skelcher's Fauna management plan from 2004 has been located. It was agreed to defer consideration of this item to a subsequent agenda, once more pressing matters have been dealt with and the extension to the NE agreement has been finalised (**Glenys**).
5. **Report from the FA meeting:** Nothing of specific relevance to FOG.
6. **Flora update:** The next FA meeting coincides with the deadline for signing the extension to the Natural England agreement (it must be in the hands of the Crewe Office before the 20th December). Consequently, Andrew Brennand (FA Chair) has asked FOG – which includes all the members of the Flora Steering Group – to consider the remaining issues arising from the meeting with Claire Harris (NE adviser) on 29th November (report circulated). At this meeting, Claire had presented details of the draft agreement to Mick, Dave, Hilary and Glenys, and provided a much clearer picture of the requirements of the management options in particular.

An unexpected outcome of this meeting was that Claire insisted that Boundary 5 (between Fields 2 and 4) should be restored in early 2014. At the FA's own task identification meeting on site on 20th October, the decision had been made to defer its restoration as something for the long term, because it was considered potentially sensitive. However, NE argues that this tallish vegetation provides a base for predators and its adverse effect in deterring lapwings

and other wetland birds is considerable because of the narrowness of Field 2. Claire did, however, agree to a compromise suggested by Dave: that the boundary be restored for much of its length, but left untouched at the eastern end, where it runs through to Upper Sowerholme.

There was considerable discussion at the FOG meeting about this boundary. For instance, Tony voiced concerns about the impact on the landscape and wildlife other than wetland birds, for whom this boundary provides a passageway. On the other hand, Oliver argued that a restored hedge would ultimately provide a better wildlife refuge than the current isolated trees with little understorey and that extra hedge is being planted to create Boundary 4 between Fields 2 and 3. He noted – from experience with Fauna – that NE has strong views on the undesirability of adjacent trees if the objective, as outlined in the proposed management option, is to attract wetland birds. At the end, the meeting agreed to support Dave's compromise. Leaving about one third of Boundary 5 undisturbed will provide essential shade and shelter for the cattle. Reducing the height of the rest of this hedgerow to the prescribed 2m maximum has the additional benefit of opening up the view across the reserve to Lancaster Castle from Pony Wood. However, it was suggested monitoring should be undertaken, once the reserve is established, of how birds move around Flora and which hedges act as corridors.

The treatment of the arable fields was the other potentially contentious issue. From NE's viewpoint, the objective is to grow an arable crop every year that provides seed for the birds. NE is not concerned about its commercial viability, and is actively in favour of a 'weedy' crop (as long as they are the 'right' weeds) but the FA is nonetheless required to produce a viable crop to justify HLS funding. For the first year, Claire is advising deep ploughing of all but the most visible lynchets as the most effective way of dealing with undesirables such as nettles, thistles and creeping buttercup (which are anticipated to be a serious problem because of Flora's history of heavy fertilisation). The principal lynchets (whose slopes will be beetle banks) will be subject only to surface ploughing, and ploughing will be in the direction of the lynchets throughout. Claire argues that soil inversion to bury the undesirables will drastically reduce the requirement to use herbicide. None may be needed in the first year, and in subsequent years it should be possible to keep control with spot spraying using glyphosate. This is no different from the FA's current approach to ragwort control. The FA, at its meeting on 20 November, has already given approval for the arable fields to be ploughed. Whilst discussion of herbicide use is to be continued at the next FA meeting, FOG took the view that the approach outlined by Natural England is consistent with current policy, and should not stand in the way of signing the agreement.

Claire has added payment for tree planting into the capital works. This will be used to create an understorey in Pony Wood. (It cannot be used for planting the extension as the ground will not be ready for this task until after the deadline for claiming capital works payments.) NE is also funding as capital works a tree survey and remedial work on Pony Wood. Andy Lee's report has been received and it recommends felling of five trees and work on another eight for safety reasons. This is acceptable to NE, so Ian was asked to instruct Andy Lee to apply immediately to the Tree Protection Officer for approval for this work. Andy will also be asked to consider leaving some of the trunks standing at a safe height. Some of the removed wood is to be left *in situ*. Dave requested that the rest should be stored somewhere on site for future use (e.g. for path edging or potential benches).

After further discussions with Claire and the graziers, the grazing regime is moving in the direction of a core herd of 1 bull and 6 cows (plus followers). This would allow the herd to

stay together at all times, and – by reducing the poaching risk and pressure on sward height – minimise the length of time that the cattle would need to be out of the fields subject to the NE agreement. The details of the new regime will eventually need to be formalised in a revised grazing agreement.

With about £80 000 of payments for both capital works and management until March 2021 at stake, the meeting recognised that there was no further time for deliberation and negotiation over the agreement. Authorisation was given to **Mick** to contact Natural England to arrange for the agreement to be signed as soon as possible.

## 7. Fauna:

- **Monthly maintenance and HLS monitoring inspection:** Full reports available. Graham is concerned about the amount of vegetation and algae clogging the ditch and pond in Upper Sowerholme (again the flush count failed to find any birds here). Advice will be sought if the problem persists. The flush count did, however, find an encouraging number of snipe (25, possibly including 3 jack snipe) in School Pond, with a similar number in the Big Meadow marsh. A brown hare was again spotted – this time in the Grammar School Field. Throughout the marshes, piles of white reed cores were noted. This is believed to be the work of field voles, and indicates a very healthy population.

Richard Storton plans to repair the leaking bund in Anna's Pool by installing an eel-friendly sluice financed by S2S. He has been in liaison with Dave over the design of the repair and using the Flora contractors to move spoil. The deadline for claiming from S2S is 1 April 2014.

**Graham** will now extend his inspections to Flora.

- **Water trough:** It is the graziers' task to connect the trough in the Gun Range to the water supply. The trough is still awaiting a hardcore base before it can be properly installed. In the meantime it could be used immediately in a temporary location as School Pond is now out of bounds as a water supply until 1st March (**Mick** to suggest this to the graziers).
- **Track extension and other works:** Should Hanafins be awarded the tender for the Flora capital works, it is anticipated that they will complete these tasks (including the water trough hardstanding) at the same time.
- **Paddock hedging:** Hanafins have also yet to make a start on the hedge on the allotment side of the Paddock (**Dave** to prompt them). Dave reminded the meeting that there was money in the existing Natural England agreement to restore the boundary on the west side of the Paddock too, by taking out/coppicing/laying some of the small trees and planting up gaps. (As this is in a conservation area, only trees with a stem diameter of under 75mm at a height of 1.5m above the ground can be treated without notifying the Tree Protection Officer.) A possible job for Volunteers or are there too many other demands on them and so better left to contractors? **Ian** will make a proposal to the next FOG meeting.

- **Willow screening of School Pond:** Graham has been collecting branches cut by the Hedge Working Party. He does not intend to start planting the screen until January or February.
  - **Breeding birds survey:** No report.
8. **Rural Payments Agency remapping:** The Orchard now has a field number: 8814. A deliberate decision has been made to leave the adjustments to reflect the internal boundaries of Fauna until after the extension to the NE agreement is signed (**Dave**).
  9. **Volunteer activities:** Ian's reports of the volunteer work undertaken during November and proposed for December are attached at the end. Ian noted that a number of lessons had been learned from the first session in Flora, which was the first occasion on which volunteers had been widely dispersed. In particular, whistles are now being given out and participants made aware of the locations of a first aid box and first aiders. It was agreed that **Ian** should book the mower in for service, the payment to be made using the Community Spaces Sustainability Grant (about £1000 still to be spent). Taking down and moving the fence between Flora Fields 3 & 4 is a priority for the volunteer session on 14th December, particularly as the cattle now have access to this field (the graziers will be asked to move them out for this session - **Ian**). Redoing the staking that has been knocked down will be ignored until the cattle are permanently excluded from these fields. The Hedge Working Party cannot start on the hedge in Flora Field 1 until there is agreement from the neighbour (**Ian** will prompt the land agent). In the meantime, the HWP is making solid progress in the Orchard. Upcoming tasks include thinning the old damson copse to give light to the apple trees and tackling silver birch etc. at the southern end (all as outlined in Ian's earlier proposals for managing 'excess' trees).

A request has been received from Lancashire Wildlife Trust for help at Freeman's Pools on Thursday 20th February to complete the planting of a hedge that FA volunteers started last year. (**Ian** to reply in the affirmative to LWT and arrange for this session to be advertised to volunteers.)

10. **Local Nature Reserve designation & Fauna Management Plan, Edenbreck boundary & garden, Concessionary Path Agreement:** No report.
11. **Educational activities:** Nothing related to the Orchard or Fauna.
12. **Health and Safety Policy: Guidance for external contractors:** Much of this has already been written. With contractors due back on site shortly, **Dave** was asked to try to finalise this document.
13. **DBS checks:** No report.
14. **Financial control:** There has been no spending of HLS money since the last meeting.
15. **Fruit tree sub-group:** Keith seems keen to develop this specialist group. When time permits, **Ian** will discuss it further with Keith, and decide how to take things forward.

16. **Volunteering: site specific risk assessment and draft flyer:** Ian has developed a site-specific risk assessment form to supplement the general risk assessment used for volunteer sessions. This is used for more hazardous activities, such as Hedge Working Parties, and is a vehicle to ensure that participants are aware of emergency arrangements, and the specific hazards and how to address them. This approach is operating well in practice. Ian has also drafted a flyer to advertise volunteering opportunities. **Meeting members** were asked to send any comments on the draft to Ian as soon as possible. **Ian** will get a quote for professional printing (to be financed from the Community Spaces Sustainability Grant).
17. **Wassailing: site preparations:** Andrew is organising. Graham is taking charge of the bonfire. Further arrangements to be made by the FA meeting.
18. **AOB:** Oliver raised two matters:
  - a) He has been approached by the editor of the annual North Lancs Naturalists' newsletter to submit a report by the end of January. **Oliver** was asked to notify him that we would prefer to skip this year.
  - b) He suggested it would be helpful to have names for the Flora fields sooner rather than later. This was agreed and will be added as an item on the agenda for the Flora Steering Group (**Glenys**).
19. **Date / place of next meeting:** Thurs 9th January 2014 (Whitegates), Thurs 6th February 7.30pm (Whitegates)

## **Ian Procter's Volunteer Items:**

### **Volunteer activities November 2013:**

#### **5<sup>th</sup> November 2013**

Having heard that we had at last secured taken possession of the (ex) Gleesons Field the fence between it and the Big Meadow was cut to the size of a gateway and the wire pulled back so as to provide access for the cattle. Fraser was informed.

The Woodland Trust consignment of 420 saplings was delivered. 225 hawthorn and blackthorn saplings were stored in the Shed, the remaining saplings were heeled in to Ian's garden. They include:

45 Silver Birch

30 Hazel

75 Rowan

45 Common Oak

These are intended for the Pony Wood extension and we should plan for their planting before the end of the winter.

### **6th November 2013**

At the suggestion of the Chair of FOG we have applied for another of the Woodland Trust's free tree packs (again Wildlife). We will hear late January for delivery in March 2014.

### **8th November 2013**

6 thick black rubber mats laid along the paths in the Orchard where they are particularly muddy. As advised by Richard Storton the rowan growing out of the hedge near the Grammar School pond was cut back.

### **9th November 2013**

Our monthly Saturday morning session attended by 19 volunteers plus 13 students from *Green Lancaster*. We were fortunate – the heavy shower forecast did not arrive until 12.40 although everyone / thing got a soaking then. Otherwise bright and breezy (weather and volunteers).

This was our first volunteering foray in to the new Flora fields and much of the following was located there.

1. We planted saplings, donated by the *Woodlands Trust*, infilling gaps in the Pads footpath abutting both Fauna and Flora fields.
2. We made considerable progress removing the Flora fence between Fields 3 and 4. For much of its length it now lies uprooted, ready to be dragged in sections to form the new (temporary) boundary between the woodland extension and Field 3.  
NOTE 1: To serve this purpose it will need new posts  
NOTE 2: Historical note – there is evidence of a former iron fence (similar to boundary 7) running East from the northern tip of Pony Wood.
3. We marked out the lynchets in Fields 3 and 4 with posts
4. We dug out and stood up the old boundary stone in Field 3
5. We retrieved stone from the broken wall alongside Aldcliffe Road and stored it along side the wall.
6. We marked with posts manhole covers in Fields 3 and 4 and the field drain in Field 1.
7. We removed the corrugated iron sheets from the hedge side in Field 3. They are neatly stacked and ready for transportation to the cow shelter in the Gun Range.
8. Scrap iron was removed from Pony Wood (former iron railings) and Field 3 (old gate) and forms a dump near the main gates of Field 3 for future disposal.
9. Keith continues his pruning of apples trees, assisted by some young helpers on this occasion.
10. Thanks to Tony for bringing his refreshments all the way to our work site. Everything takes a bit longer in the far reaches of our enlarged nature reserve.
11. Meanwhile, back at the Playground, volunteers cleared up after a very unofficial and very messy November 5<sup>th</sup> bonfire.

The fact that we were dispersed over our whole site did have its downsides:

- a) One student suffered a slight cut to her finger but our first aid kits were at some distance to her work site. This would have been more serious with a severe gash, for example. Especially with large groups and dispersed sites we must pay more attention to quite where the first aid kits are located. I have also learnt the foresters in the Lake District woodlands carry whistles to keep in touch. I have acquired six whistles and intend to issue them to 'group leaders' on volunteering days.
- b) Our lack of toilet facilities caused some difficulties amongst the students. We must emphasise again to Green Lancaster that student volunteers must be forewarned and urged to use, for example, the station facilities before coming down to us.

Thanks to Oliver for valuable feedback.

### **16<sup>th</sup> November 2013**

As the cattle had been reluctant to cross the Brook, the opening to the Flora fields was widened and (by the 17<sup>th</sup>) was successful.

The corrugated sheets (above) were sorted into useful and scrap, the latter assembled with the scrap metal (above). Arrangements made to have the scrap collected and the sheets moved to Carr House Meadow. (Both tasks now done 29/11/13.)

### **20<sup>th</sup> November 2013**

The first meeting this winter of the Hedge Working Party saw 6 volunteers gather in the Orchard. As chain saws were to be employed a Site Specific Risk Assessment was undertaken. We:

1. Coppiced two large hazels, cutting the results into hedging stakes, Fencing strips and brush.
2. Felled a substantial sycamore in the Orchard hedge adjoining Pads footpath.
3. Layed a section of hedge at the northern end of the Pads footpath.
4. Carted away (most of) the debris from the above to Fraser's bonfire site (with permission). Exhaustion set in before we had quite completed.

### **26<sup>th</sup> November 2013**

13 volunteers enjoyed the annual volunteers' meal held at *The Spaghetti House, Lancaster*.

### **27<sup>th</sup> November 2013**

7 volunteers joined in the Hedge Working Party. The Site Specific Risk Assessment was agreed. We

1. Covered the sycamore stumps left last week with black plastic to try to prevent further growth.
2. Layed two further sections of the Orchard hedge adjoining the Pads footpath.
3. Pollarded a large goat willow, keeping some of the rods for planting as the living fence near School Pond
4. Carted away (most) of the debris from the above to the bonfire site

## Proposed Volunteer Tasks for December 2013

### 1. A Proposal. The Mower

The grass mower has not been serviced for at least the last two winters. It does a lot of work each summer and the blade is rather blunt so I propose a general service of the engine and cutting blade.

I suggest Lune Valley Lawn Mowers in Sylvester Street as I can push the machine there.

### 2. Tasks for Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> December

- a. Graffiti removal in the playground (I think Andrew is doing this with the [charged] power sander)
- b. Removal of leaves in the lane running down from Sunnyside Lane (Fraser mentioned asking the Council to bring their machine in but I have heard / seen nothing more)
- c. Continue the tasks we started in Flora, namely
  - i. Dismantling the fence at boundary 3. Once down, we need to cut it into manageable sections and move it to Pony Wood for temporary storage.
  - ii. Infilling hedge gaps with thorn saplings. One small section of the Pads hedge was missed near the Orchard and then there is one more challenging section near the concrete wall.
  - iii. Check again for reusable stone near the wall and the concrete trough near Aldcliffe Road
  - iv. Reinstate all the stakes and the boundary stone knocked over by the cattle.
- d. In addition in Flora
  - i. Carefully dig two exploratory lateral trenches at the concrete wall to determine its foundations.
  - ii. Make a plan as to how the former boundary 3 fence is to be re-erected as boundary 2 (after ploughing)
  - iii. Investigate boarding in Pony Wood

### 3. Tasks for the Hedge Working Party

- a. Continue with already FOG approved tasks
  - i. Laying the west hedge of the West Field (Richard Taylor getting back to me this week)
  - ii. Laying sections of the Orchard hedge alongside the Pads footpath
  - iii. Pollarding willows
- b. Undertake the work just to the north of the Towneley path to create more light for the apple trees
- c. Undertake work toward the southern end of the Orchard, thus spreading out the tree management over the whole site.